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A BRIEF HISTORY OF ANACOSTIA, ITS NAME, ORIGIN AND PROGRESS.

By CHARLES R. BURR.

(Read before the Society, December 16, 1919.)

It seems to me best to divide my subject into three sections.

FIRST, NACOTCHTANK.

Anacostia appears on the oldest map of Captain John Smith, published in 1612; it is there called "Nacotchtank," Captain Smith in his "General Historie of Virginia" tells us that he and his twelve companions in their explorations around the Chesapeake Bay and its tributary rivers, were well received by the Nacotchtank, who were the most northerly of those Algonquin Indian tribes which were surrounded by the Iroquois and which were known as the Powhatan Indians.

At Captain Smith's time the Nacotchtank were on the war path with the "Patawomeke" on the present Potomac Creek, Stafford County, Va.

About the year 1621, the pinnace *Tiger* with twenty six men was sent from Jamestown, Va., to trade corn with the Indians near the head of navigation on the Potomac River. They were attacked by the Nacotchtank and all were either killed or taken prisoners, among the latter was a young man—Henry Fleet. Remaining in captivity about five years, Fleet learned the language spoken by all the Powhatan Indians and which he used to great advantage after being ransomed, while trading for skins. He made two journeys during a year up the Potomac River to Nacotchtank.

One of these journeys, made in 1632, he has described in a "Brief Journal of a voyage," the original of the description is in the Lambeth Palace Library in London. It was published, partly incorrectly, twice by E. D. Neil in "Founders of Maryland and Colonization of America" and then by J. Thomas Scharf in his "History of Maryland."

One passage in that journal is interesting for us, as it refers to the present site of Anacostia. Instead of Nacotchtank, Fleet uses the form Nacostine; but in the earliest reports of the sessions of the Assembly and of the Council in St. Mary's, also in the reports which were sent to Rome by the Jesuit fathers who accompanied Leonard Calvert, and especially by Andrew White, the form with the prefix "A" is used: Anacostines. (Anacostans). Etymologically this form is perhaps the more correct, although the Indians themselves may have used the form without the prefix "A"; as they often eliminated prefixes and suffixes of words.

Anaquash (e) tan (i) k which means a town of traders.

This explanation is very significant, for the present Anacostia and its surroundings: the villages of the Nacostine (extending from Bennings on the Anacostia River, thence along the Potomac River below Congress Heights to Shepherd's Landing and to Broad Creek Md., opposite Alexandria, Va.), were before the arrival of the whites, lively trading posts, which were visited by the Iroquois from the present state of New York.

Even after the founding of the colony of Maryland, Leonard Calvert in a letter to an English merchant in London mentions three places in the province best suited for trading posts with the Indians. One of the three is Anacostan, on account of the visiting there of the Massameke, a collective name for the "Five Nations."

Soon after the year 1668 parts of the Indian tribes

residing south of the Anacostia River were driven across it. About this time Anacostans settled the present Anacostine Island which appears on the map of Augustine Herman, of Maryland (1670) as Anacostine Isle.

By the foregoing it will be seen that years ago before the City of Washington was even contemplated or its site known by the white people, a small Indian village on the Eastern Branch of the Potomac River, called Nachatank was then one of the most important of several small settlements about the mouth of the Piscataway River.

As a good trading post, Nachatank, as named by the tribe of Indians settled there, in honor of their Chief Nachatank, became well known by many of the earlier European trading ships; and the great abundance of game, the mild climate, and the genial natives found there, made this small port a favorite bartering point.

Father White, who accompanied Lord Baltimore on a visit describes the Nachatank Indians as a liberal and ingenuous disposition, with an acuteness of sight, smell and taste; especially as to taste, possessing a great fondness for an article of food called pone and hominy.

These Indians were descendants of the great Powhatan tribes, who had crossed from the Northern part of Virginia to the Maryland side of the Potomac River.

Reports of this ideal spot on the Eastern Branch of the Potomac, with its mild climate, its wonderful forests, its wild game in great numbers and its great fame as a fishing ground, had spread not only to the neighboring Indian tribes but to the white settlers beyond.

But like many of the Indian tribes the Nachatanks were susceptible to the liquor which the white man had for barter, and first the game of their forests and streams and then their lands were given up to the

white man for their indulgences, until they were finally pushed back to the settlements close to the Piscataway River.

Later the white settlers experienced trouble and annoyance from Nacotchtank, the Chief, who with a couple of his warriors would suddenly break in upon their peace and security, and having obtained sufficient fire-water would terrorize the villages by raids of plunder and deviltry.

Later it will be seen this village on the Eastern Branch of the Potomac became known and designated as Uniontown.

SECOND

The Indian settlement Nacotchtank became the white settlement Anacostia. The prince of promoters of the Capital City, James Greenleaf, five years or so before the century turn, eighteen hundred, bought on the meanders of the Eastern Branch of the Potowmack, close by the Anacostia Fort. This fort, it can be presumed, was on the heights now within the bounds of Anacostia.

The Eastern Branch ferry connected with Upper Marlborough road where it crossed the Piscataway road which connected with Bladensburg. The ferry was at the foot of Kentucky avenue and a bridge there was built in 1795 and known as the lower bridge in distinction to that more eastward known as the upper bridge. The Navy Yard created requirement and at the terminus of Eleventh Street was built, 1818, the Navy Yard bridge. That part of the Piscataway road east of the Navy Yard bridge is the modern Minnesota Avenue. The thin settlement called Anacostia was along the river front near the bridges.

In the *Daily National Intelligencer*, February 8, 1849, is:

"A New Post Office is established at Anacostia, Washington county, D. C., and John Lloyd appointed Postmaster. The new office takes the place of 'Good Hope,' which was discontinued in consequence of the removal of the Postmaster."

On the authority of Mr. Simmons¹ it is stated that the post office designation so continued until 1865; when it was changed to Uniontown; to be again Anacostia in 1869.

Right where the crossing of the Navy Yard bridge on the Anacostia side was complete stood the tavern of Duvall to give the traveller invitation to good cheer. The tavern is there now or rather the shell of it. Not now, is as once was it, the proof of Dr. Samuel Johnson's Boswell-quoted remark: "There is nothing which has yet been contrived by man by which so much happiness is produced as by a good tavern or inn."

George Simmons in "Roadside Sketches," *The Evening Star*, December 5, 1891, has:

"Forty years ago the site of Anacostia was farm lands and was owned by one Enoch Tucker. It formerly belonged to the William Marbury estate and was part of the 'Chichester' tract. There were 240 acres in the Tucker farm, a good part of which was cultivated for truck purposes. Mr. Tucker did not attend to the farm work himself, however, for he was employed as boss blacksmith in the navy yard. The farm was either leased or worked on the share plan. The Tucker farm house stood alone in the old days, and until recently, occupied the site of the present new Pyles block, on the west side of Monroe street, just south of Harrison street and the bridge. In 1854 John Fox and John W. VanHook and John Dobler bought the farm from Tucker for \$19,000 and divided it into building lots."²

The date of the conveyance from Tucker is June 5, 1854.

¹ George Simmons, *The Evening Star*, December 5, 1891.

² Liber J. A. S., 78, f. 114. Land Records, D. C., 240 a. 5 r. 31 p.

The advertisements give the rise, progress and consummation of the promotion.

Daily Evening Star, June 10, 1854:

NOTICE TO UNION TOWN LOT HOLDERS.

The fire which occurred on the 5th instant having destroyed our office, Papers, etc., renders it necessary to postpone the drawing for the Union Town Building Lots until Monday next, at 8 o'clock, p.m., when it will take place at our new office, on Seventh st. a few doors above Odd Fellows Hall, until which time persons have the privilege of subscribing for the few remaining Lots at the present very low price, viz.: \$60; payable in monthly installments of \$3 each; for a Lot 24 feet front by 130 feet deep, situated in the most beautiful and healthy neighborhood around Washington,—The streets will be graded the gutters paved, and edged with shade trees, without charge to lot holders.

Persons in arrears with their monthly dues, are required to pay up or their names will be left out of the drawing.

"Deeds in fee simple," "guaranteed clear of all and every incumbrance," will be given to Lot holders paying up in full at any time after the drawing on MONDAY EVENING next.

Office open from 8 a.m. until 9 o'clock, p.m.

JNO. FOX, *Secretary.*

Daily Evening Star, July 29, 1854:

HOMES FOR ALL.

THE UNION LAND ASSOCIATION having sold and located by ballot the 350 Building Lots advertised during the last two months, are now prepared to sell the remaining 350 lots, "with the privilege of selection."

The subdivision, Uniontown, is recorded in the office of the Surveyor in book Levy Court, No. 2, pages A 83 and B 83, October 9, 1873. Uniontown was between the fork created by the Upper Marborough road and the Piscataway road. To the thoroughfare

eastward, a part of the Marlborough road, was given the name Harrison Street and to the thoroughfare southward a part of the Piscataway road was given the name Monroe Street. The other streets of Uniontown likewise were named in honor of the Presidents.

The proximity of the Navy Yard to the bridge no doubt, gave the promoters the belief that many of the employees would take advantage of having a home, with country life adjunct, near their place of business. Uniontown is the first suburban subdivision and because of the river separation is not likely to lose its suburban identity. The Duvall subdivision is to the west of Monroe Street at the river. Other subdivisions fairly encompass the original subdivision.

Mr. Simmons says in the "Roadside Sketches":

"The first house erected in the new town after the subdivision was completed was the old two-story brick on Harrison street, now occupied by Wetzels store and bakery, George F. Pyle's grocery store, nearly adjoining on the west, soon followed.

"But the oldest house within the limits of the town today is the old Fox mansion on the south side of Jefferson street, which was built many years before Anacostia was thought of. It was built by John Fox, one of the founders of the place, and was his residence until his death. It is now occupied by W. H. Richards. At one time it was the residence of Dr. A. M. Green. Another very old building is the small frame structure on Harrison street, a little west of Anderson's blacksmith shop. This house was built by James Buckley, who was bridgekeeper in the days of tolls."³

John Fox and John W. VanHook were the real estate firm of Fox and VanHook for some years prior to 1863. That year it was a firm of commission merchants. In 1864, Mr. VanHook continued as a commission merchant and Mr. Fox became of the firm Fitch, Hine

See Topographical Map of the District of Columbia surveyed in the years 1856, '57, '58, '59 by A. Boschke.

and Fox, attorneys and claim agents. Mr. Fox's business associates are the honorably remembered James E. Fitch and Lemon G. Hine. After 1865, Mr. Fox does not appear in the local directory.

John Welsh VanHook was born in Philadelphia in 1825. At an early age he moved to Baltimore. At Baltimore in conjunction with John Hopkins he did much in suburban development. In 1852 he moved to Washington.

Mr. VanHook was commended by President Lincoln and General Grant for having carried dispatches from Philadelphia to Washington via Baltimore at the time when the last named city was the hot bed of Confederate sympathizers.

He died, April 9, 1905, at the home of his daughter, Mrs. Middleton C. Smith, 1616 Nineteenth Street, N. W. Washington, D. C. He is interred in Congressional Cemetery.⁴

The residence of Mr. VanHook, "Cedar Hill," became that of Frederick Douglass, the preëminent of his race. Officially, in the District of Columbia, the only colored man to be U. S. Marshal and the first Recorder of Deeds. The property passed to the Frederick Douglass Memorial Association.

Hiram Pitts who owned and occupied the property eastwardly, adjoining the VanHook mansion, was vigorous to the day of his death, which was in his ninety sixth year. Long he was employed in the U. S. Treasury.

Of Dr. Thomas Antisell in the *History of the Medical Society of the District of Columbia* is a biographical sketch in detail with two likenesses. He made a geological reconnaissance of southern California and of the territory of Arizona on an expedition for the Pacific Railroad. For Japan he was technologist of a commission to develop the resources of the northern islands

⁴ *The Washington Post*, April 10, 1905.

of that empire, and was decorated by the Mikado with the Order of the Rising Sun of Meijis." But a review of his activities takes much type space. Dr. Antisell lived in Uniontown or its borders from 1866 to 1871.

Dr. Arthur Christie was an Englishman who inherited quite a large sum from relatives in England. He purchased fifty acres or so between Harrison Street and the Eastern Branch which he made his home and called it Fairlawn. It was patterned after an English estate with pretentious residence, a lodge, and landscapic effect.

In every department of life's work, professional, mercantile or otherwise, honorably to be classified, Anacostia has its exponents. Passed away recently that is, October 14, 1919, did the Rev. Willard Goss Davenport. Without any diminution of practicality on account of it, Mr. Davenport had all the naturalness and goodness of Goldsmith's creation, the Vicar of Wakefield. Of his ministry, twenty eight years of it he consecrated to Anacostia. He was a native of Vermont; and in a fiction of fact he, in a delightful work "Blairlee," portrayed the character of the folks of the Green Mountain state.

When Mr. Fox, Mr. VanHook and Mr. Dobler were crossing the bridge on their way to view the prospective purchase for the prospective town they saw on the river's edge opposite the Navy Yard the mansion of George Washington Talburtt. It is there now except the parts knocked off. It is not so near the edge of the water for a wide area of unsightly land has been made by dredging and dumping in the work of reclamation. In the fifties as in the forties, the scene was the same. The streams from the highlands of Montgomery had united and were just beyond to pour their flood to make more majestic the Potomac. Of the

"Earth's tall sons, the cedar, oak, and pine"

who to full stature had grown even before the days of Lewin Talburtt, the father of George W. were close to the mansion but closer than any other was a mighty chestnut. A little off was the cottage of the overseer (Woodruff) and in sight the quarters of those who did the tillage.

The mansion and its outlook was inspiring. It was a place to be appreciated and appropriate for the tarrying there of a man of wonderful thoughts and of brilliancy in expressing it, if one who could produce a tragedy like Brutus for Edmund Kean to impersonate, like Charles, the Second, for Charles Kemble to impersonate, like Virginius for John McCullough to impersonate; for one, who in light vein could unite comedy or who could turn the source of delight to opera.

He who has George Washington Talburtt for his ancestor, not more than two generations in advance; he, who strolls here, there and everywhere around these parts and then tells who and what he saw in the strolls in the most delightful way and gives more delight to the most people, he, it is, who told the writer: It is true John Howard Payne and George Washington Talburtt were intimate friends and in their mutuality "were chummy and rummy." It is not yet forbidden to be chummy but the other exaltedly happy condition is a pleasure of the past, not to return without the country re-reforms.

Mr. Simmons in his "Roadside Sketch" through and about Anacostia has this to say:

"The late George W. Talburtt, the then proprietor of the Talburtt estate was the friend and boon companion of Payne. Although there was a disparity in their ages, Payne being much the elder, there was something in their virtues that drew them toward each other. Perhaps it was the love of music, for which they were both noted. And then each was of a convivial turn, and each played and sang well. Both

were bachelors when the famous song was written, and their companionship was almost inseparable. They would sit for hours together of a summer evening under the spreading branches of the old tree, singing and playing favorite airs, and it is a matter of neighborhood gossip that jolly old Bacchus looked on approvingly on those occasions."

This is an excerpt from an autographic letter reproduced in a biography:

"WASHINGTON CITY, FULLER'S HOTEL,
September 13 ,1841.

"intending to employ my earliest leisure when I got to a resting place, in writing you a full account of the origin and first form, of a little song you ask for, which was composed for an opera called *Clair, the Maid of Milan*, that I sent from Paris for performance in London."

The play which Payne sold to Charles Kemble for 30lb was at the request of the latter, by the former converted into an opera. Payne adapted in a measure a melody heard sung by an Italian peasant girl, to his original words "*Home, Sweet Home.*" It was first sung by Ann Maria Tree in the Covent Garden Theatre, London, May 8, 1823. As often happens in the literary creations of the ages, not the author but his grantee gets the gold therefor. "*The lowly thatched cottage*" if suggested by a reality, may have been the boyhood home at East Hampton, Long Island.

Not under the chestnut tree within the Talburtt domain and the purlieu of Anacostia was the immortal song created, yet it can be claimed, confidently, that under the canopy of chestnut boughs these jolly good fellows under the influence and inspiration of that which "*maketh merry,*" blended harmoniously their voices in the acclaim:

"There's no place like home."

THIRD.

Uniontown although without sidewalks, or street pavements, these being graveled, was becoming a thriving place. Many stores of all kinds having sprung up to accommodate the trade coming from lower down in Maryland both by Harrison Street and Monroe Street.

Later on, Uniontown, District of Columbia, having become confused so much with Uniontown, Pennsylvania, and causing so much confusion in business, it was decided to change its name to its original—Anacostia.

Since the reorganization of the Anacostia Citizens Association in 1904 the following are some of the improvements that have resulted directly or indirectly from its influence and activities:

The building of a new and modern Police Station and the establishment of the Eleventh Precinct.

The purchase of ground and the erection of the Ketcham School House.

The laying of new street pavement on 14th Street from Good Hope Road to V Street.

The naming and improvement of Logan Park on Fourteenth Street.

Erection of flag pole and flying of flag in Logan Park.

The installation of granolithic sidewalks in several streets.

Regrading and improvements in U, V, and W Streets. Improvements in Thirteenth Street from Good Hope Road to Pleasant Street.

The Association was very active in getting legislation toward the reclamation of the Anacostia Flats.

Also in regard to the location of the causeway of the new bridge.

It has ever been very active and somewhat successful in getting improvements in the street railway service, and was active in getting legislation in connection

with the Union Station Branch of the railway up First Street East.

It was active in getting through legislation for placing underground, the electric conduit of the railroad, and which it is hoped to soon see established through Anacostia.

It was instrumental in getting a new building for the Branch Post Office and in obtaining many improvements to the service here in the collection and delivery of mail.

It was successful in having placed gas lamps in many places throughout the locality.

In having Mount View Place and Shannon Place extended.

Labored earnestly for the extension of water mains, etc., which improvement is now underway.

Instrumental in the improvement to the railroad yard.

Its last success was in getting the express and baggage house-to-house delivery and collection, and the delivery of telegrams—the same as on the other side of the river.

We are now working on the project of paving and grading Nichols Avenue, and the placing underground of the electric conduit of the street railroad which we expect to succeed in.

We have now all the conveniences the rest of the city affords, but will continue our efforts to make improvements wherever needed through Anacostia. We are only 30 minutes from the center of the city by street cars and are the best equipped of any of the outlying parts of Washington City.

All of the principal business places in the heart of the city deliver goods here, while there are here stores of all kinds which supply one with anything he may wish in merchandise and other household necessities.